

A

# FREE ADDRESS

T O

Protestant Dissenters, as such.

BY J. PRIESTLEY, LL. D. F. R. S.

THE THIRD EDITION ENLARGED.

*After the manner which they call heresy, so worship  
I the God of my fathers, PAUL.*

BIRMINGHAM,

PRINTED BY PEARSON AND ROLLASON, FOR J. JOHNSON,  
NO. 72. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.

MDCCLXXXVIII.

[Price One Shilling and Six-pence.]

1803





T H E

## P R E F A C E.

**T**HE present situation of the dissenting interest makes any apology for this address superfluous. If the author be blamed for reflecting on the church of England, when he can plead no particular provocation for it; let it be considered, that this has been done only *indirectly*, and when his subject unavoidably led to it. As the address is directed to *Dissenters* only; the members of the established church have no business with it; and if they never look into what is not addressed to them, or intended for their inspection, no offence can be taken.

If, on looking into this performance, they do not find it to be written in the tame and humble style of an *apologist*, they should consider that the writer does not think there

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is any thing in the principles of the dissenters as such, so palpably open to objection, as to require an apology.

The things that seem to want an apology are the doctrines of original sin, predestination, trinity in unity, satisfaction by vicarious punishments, &c. a hierarchy, consisting of persons with names and powers altogether unknown in the New Testament; ecclesiastical persons, as such, invested with civil power, contrary to the very genius of the religion of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom was not of this world; and civil officers assuming a power to decide concerning articles of faith; subscriptions to creeds of human composition; the imposition of ceremonies by the authority of men, in a church, of which Christ alone is the head; and the absolute enjoining of rites, which are the remains and badges of popish superstition; such as the wearing of a surplice, the sign of the cross, with god-fathers and god-mothers in baptism; confirmation by the imposition of the hands of a bishop; wheeling about to the east, and bowing at the name of *Jesus* (as if it was a mere sound that was worshipped) and the enjoining of the posture of kneeling at  
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the lord's supper, &c. &c. &c. Such as these are the things that look as if they wanted some *apology*; for, certainly, their reasonableness is far from being evident at first sight.

If it be asked, why, in the first Edition of this Pamphlet, I chose to conceal my name, I answer it was not because I was apprehensive of making myself obnoxious to the members of the church of England. If they understand me right, they will perceive that my intentions towards them are far from being unfriendly; and if they understand me wrong, and put an unfair and uncandid construction upon what I have written; I trust that, with a good meaning, and in a good cause, I shall never be overawed by the fear of any thing that men may *think* of me, or *do* to me.

Neither was it because I was apprehensive of giving offence, either to the *ministers*, or to the people among the dissenters, because I have spoken with equal freedom to both; but, in reality, because I was unwilling to lessen the weight of my observations and advice, by any reflections that might be made on the person from whom they came. An anonymous author is like the



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abstract idea of a man, which may be conceived to be as perfect as the imagination of the reader can make it.

This Address however, has been so long known to be mine, that in this third edition, I prefix my name to it.

If any person, who is not a dissenter, should take it into his head, that by reading this Address, he will become possessed of a great secret, and be acquainted with the real sentiments and views of the dissenters, as a body, he will deceive himself. Dissenter *as such* have nothing in common but a dissent from the established church; and it by no means follows that they, therefore, agree in any thing else. The majority of the dissenters will be more offended at this performance than any member of the church of England; and even that part of the dissenters to whom it is more particularly addressed will be far from being universally pleased with it. The author is a single person, who writes without the concurrence of any other person whatever, and is therefore answerable only for his own private sentiments and conduct.

If it be said that this address was written purposely to gain converts from the church

church of England; though in an indirect manner, the author can only reply by saying, that he really had no such views or expectations. At the same time, he would have no objection to acknowledge it, if that had been either a primary, or a secondary object in this publication. It is certainly no crime in a man to write in defence of what he thinks to be a good cause, or to endeavour to gain converts to it from what he thinks to be a bad one.

He, no doubt, like the rest of mankind, sincerely wishes that other persons would enter into his views, and adopt his sentiments; but having no *dragoons* to employ for this purpose, and no *acts of parliament* to second him, he must be content to do what he can by the help of reason and argument alone; and these spiritual weapons, are by no means so certain in their effects on the *minds*, as carnal weapons are on the *bodies* of men; so that no person need be apprehensive, especially in this age, in which riches, fashion, and power have such influence, of any great execution being done, or any great changes being brought about by *books* only, which few persons read, and fewer regard.

Though

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Though this Address was certainly written with a serious desire to make dissenters think, and act in a manner worthy of their profession; it is not, however, any part of the author's intention to revive the spirit of a *party*; except, primarily, so far as the party has *religion*, that is, the interests of its members in another world, for its object; and, secondarily, so far as the interest of this particular party, in *civil matters*, is the interest of the whole society of which they are members; having for its object the cause of *liberty*, and all the valuable rights of Englishmen.

The author of this work is not much concerned about the *civil privileges* of the dissenters as such, and as a separate body in the state; but he most earnestly wishes that their liberal and generous views, with respect to civil and religious liberty, may be so fully imbibed by themselves, and so far diffused among others, as that all their countrymen, without excepting their most violent enemies, may reap the benefit of them. This performance is certainly intended to make one particular part of the commonwealth more respectable; but this part is of such a nature, that the author  
conceives



conceives that the necessary consequence of their being more respectable would be a great increase of glory to his country at large, from which that part would derive no particular advantage, except the honour of having contributed to it.

If the author appear to wish for a farther reformation in the established church, it is with no interested views, derived from his expectation of a comprehension of the dissenters in it. Were he himself permitted to new model the ecclesiastical establishment of his country, he would do it according to his best judgment, and according to his present ideas of perfection in things of that nature; but he would not be a member of it himself so long as it was a *national establishment*; because he thinks it is more for the interest of christianity, that particular societies of christians should be as free and independent as private persons. He does not apprehend that any greater inconvenience would arise from unbounded liberty being given to every man to think and act for himself in all matters of religion, than there is found to arise from the same liberty with respect to medicine. It appears to him that individuals

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duals would provide better for themselves, in both these respects, than their civil governors ever have done, are disposed, or are able, to do for them.

To *dissenters* the author recommends a candid and serious attention to the subject of this address. He was very serious in writing it, and will rejoice exceedingly if it have any good effect on ever so few of the members of that body to which he belongs. Gladly would he contribute to render them in any degree more respectable as *men*, as *Englishmen*, and as *christians*; that, unfettered as they are by any laws, but those of *their one only master, even Christ*, they may exhibit a specimen of a truly christian temper and conduct, by joining the religious zeal of their ancestors to their own enlarged views, and liberal sentiments; things which are so far from being incompatible, that they have, naturally the closest connexion.

Earnestly does he wish that *ministers*, being free from the impositions of men, would apply with more assiduity to the faithful and chearful discharge of their proper duty, in enlightening the minds, and improving the hearts and the conduct of  
their

their hearers; setting them an example of unbounded confidence in divine providence, under the circumstances of a scanty and precarious provision, of a conscientious and fearless integrity in asserting *the truth as it is in Jesus*, of a generous contempt of the pleasures and pains of this life, when they tend to lead men from the path of their duty; and, universally, of the prevailing influence of those considerations which are drawn from those character, as *citizens of heaven*, over those which result from their interest in this transitory world. Earnestly, also, does he wish that *the people* may be duly influenced by such examples, and instructions; that, though they are more engaged in the business and commerce of this world, they may not lose sight of their relation to another.

May ministers and people jointly strengthen each others hands in the great work of reformation, and bear a noble testimony against all antichristian errors and superstition. Instead of being discouraged by the reproaches and hardships to which their profession exposes them, may they rather *rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame* in so glorious a cause. By  
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their peaceable and inoffensive behaviour may prove themselves worthy of the protection of the civil government, how much soever they may disapprove of the maxims, or the administration of it. May they excite the honest emulation of the members of the established church, and of christians of every other denomination, by their zeal to promote all kinds of useful knowledge, by their attention to the advancement of the best interests of society, and by their exemplary care to understand their religion, and to live according to the rules of it; that, whatever treatment they may meet with in the world, they may secure the approbation of the great judge of hearts and actions, and, at least, *deserve well* of their country and of mankind.

N.B. This Preface, except the Paragraph Page 5, is written in the *third person*, because the Address was original anonymous.

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A D D R E S S  
T O

Protestant Dissenters, as such.

My Christian Brethren,

**I** AM a Protestant Dissenter, I glory in the name, and it is with a view to render you, in general more sensible of its dignity, and importance, that I take the liberty to make this free address to you. Sorry I am, from a regard to the interests of truth and liberty, to see the zeal of many to cool in so noble a cause, for which our heroic ancestors sacrificed so much; when the reasons for our dissent are so far from having been lessened, in number or weight, in the interval between their times and ours, that, in proportion to the improvements in religious knowledge, these reasons have been greatly multiplied, and continue to grow in number and strength every day. Yet, paradoxical as it may appear, those

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of us, who have these growing reasons to be satisfied with this cause of truth and liberty, are generally less strongly attached to it, and more easily and frequently desert it, than those whose opinions are such, that they have less reason than ever to separate from the established church. It is to the former class of dissenters, therefore, that I would be understood to address myself in a more particular manner, and I beg nothing more, my brethren, than your candid attention, while I argue this matter with you, considering you both in a *religious* and a *civil* capacity. I promise you I will take up as little of your time as I can help, and use as few words as possible, to make you fully sensible of what I have to propose to your consideration.

## SECTION



## SECTION I.

*Of the Importance of the Dissenting Interest,  
with Respect to Religion.*

IF I consider the subject of our dissent as a matter purely *religious*, I cannot help thinking it of the utmost importance, even to the cause of christianity in general. That gross corruptions have been introduced into this most excellent scheme of religion, corruptions which began very early, and which have been confirmed by long continuance, corruptions which totally disfigure it, and defeat the principal ends of its institution, is a lamentable truth, universally acknowledged by protestants. If christianity itself, therefore, be of importance, it must be of importance to free it from these corruptions: for whether it be better for men to be christians at all, or to continue papists, is very problematical, and a question which many sensible persons would not hesitate to determine in the negative. But to whom are we to look for the advancement of this necessary work of reformation from the errors and abuses of popery?

pery? I answer, without hesitation, it is to *dissenters* only, of whatever denomination, in every christian country:

Can it be supposed that the princes of this world, or *mere statesmen*, who are the persons that erect or model, according to their pleasure, all ecclesiastical establishments, will ever have this business at heart; or that, if they should undertake it, they are duly qualified for the conduct of it? It cannot be expected that religion should ever be a primary object with civil governors. They may make use of it as an engine of state policy, to promote their own secular ends; but, in general, they are too much *men of this world*, to concern themselves about a scheme, the great object of which is *a world to come*; and, provided religion give them no great interruption in their plans of civil policy, it cannot be thought that they will ever voluntarily promote any reformation in it.

Their interest is, generally, best answered by the quiet continuance of all things of this nature, which are foreign to their immediate province, in the condition in which they are, and have been, let that condition be ever so wretched; and they are ready to take the alarm at every thing  
that

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that may hazard their tranquility, or create disturbance in the state: and reformation in religion, especially when it has been violently attempted, and when corruptions and abuses (by means of the injudicious interposition of government) have been confirmed by long continuance, is known to have this tendency.

I seemed to lament that the princes of this world are not disposed to concern themselves about reformation in religion; but, indeed, it is rather a happiness that they are not. For all the service they can do to religion is not to intermeddle with it at all, so as to interrupt the reformations which might take place in it from natural and proper causes; and for this *negative assistance* the friends of religion would think themselves under the greatest obligation to civil government.

Civil power is a very improper engine to be employed in a work of this nature; and, whenever employed, can hardly fail to defeat its end. Wherever *opinion* is concerned; *force* of all kinds and all motives of *interest* (both of which will ever accompany the civil magistrate) ought to be removed to the greatest distance; and spontaneous, disinterested, and calm rea-



soning have the field entirely to herself. Jesus Christ and his apostles asked no aid of the civil powers, nor gave the most distant hint of their desire of any alliance with them.

*Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis*

VIRGIL.

The kingdom of Christ is not represented by any part of the metallic image of king Nebuchadnezzar, which denoted all the empires of this world; but is the *little stone cut out of the mountain without hands*. It is a thing quite foreign to the image, and will at last fall upon it, and destroy all the remains of it. All that true christianity wishes, is to be unmolested by the kings and rulers of the earth, but it can never submit to their regulations. No christian prince before the Reformation ever interfered in the business of religion without establishing the abuses which had crept into it; and all that christian princes have done since the Reformation, has tended to retard that great work; and to them, and their interference it is manifestly owing, that it is no farther advanced at this day.

There needs to be no greater evidence of this, with respect to England, than a comparison between the reformation proposed by Wickliffe,

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Wickliffe, so early as the year 1460, and the church of England as by law established, from the year 1559, in the reign of queen Elizabeth, to the present year 1769,\* and as it will probably continue so long as our civil and ecclesiastical governors shall be able to maintain it, in its present imperfect state, notwithstanding the increasing light of the age.

Wickliffe admitted of no more than two degrees in the ministerial office, viz. *deacons*, and *presbyters*, or *bishops*. "These two," says he, "were known in Paul's time, and the others are the invention of 'imperious pride.'" The church of England has *archbishops*, *bishops*, *archdeacons*, *deans*, *canons*, *prebendaries*, &c. &c. &c. Wickliffe says, that "civil government should not be committed to the clergy." We suffer the seat of all the bishops in the highest house of parliament, and give them power in ecclesiastical courts; in which they have cognizance of civil matters, and in which punishments are inflicted that affect the persons, liberties, and fortunes of British subjects; though the proceedings are contrary to those which are

\* When the first edition of this address was published.

in use in the civil courts, and repugnant to the free constitution of this government.

Wickliffe would have abolished all ceremonies in religion not prescribed in the scriptures. He says that "confirmation, " giving orders, and the consecration of " places were reserved to the pope and bishops for the sake of temporal gain and " honour; that it is not lawful for a christian, after the full publication of the " law of Christ, to devise, himself, " any other laws for the government of the " church;" and he condemns a set of prescribed forms of prayer, as derogatory from the liberty God had given them. How consonant, in every article, is all this to reason, christianity, and good sense; but how opposite to this, in every article, are the maxims of the church of England, as by law established.

Had not our civil governors (among whom, let it be observed, I include the bishops, and all the members of the hierarchy) taken the alarm, and opposed the attempts of Wickliffe and his partizans, there is no doubt, but that a reformation would speedily have taken place upon his enlarged plan. And since, without the interference



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terference of the civil magistrate, he himself could not have formed any other establishment, more light would have continued to be thrown upon religious subjects; and not only would the *discipline*, but the *doctrines* of the church, have been reformed more and more. Whereas, such have been the effects of the interference of the civil magistrate in the religion of this country, that, instead of seeing things in this glorious train, all that has been effected thitherto, is a miserable compromise between popery, and the imperfect plan of reformation proposed by Wickliffe.

If the errors and abuses which Wickliffe discovered have not yet been reformed, how can we expect a reformation of those errors which he never suspected, but which he retained, as the most sacred of all truths, and which he would have been shocked to have heard called in question? And yet, I have heard of no christian establishment in Europe, in which the grossest corruptions of the most fundamental doctrines of the gospel are not retained; corruptions which entirely pervert the whole scheme, and are so repugnant to our natural notions of God and virtue, that,

so long as they are known to be maintained by christians in general, and considered as essential parts of the scheme of christianity, they must necessarily prove an insuperable obstacle to its propagation in the world, and especially to the conversion of the Jews and Mohammedans.

With them the belief of the *divine unity* is, and indeed justly, a fundamental article of faith. This is also the clear doctrine both of the Old and New Testament; but, not being the faith of the generality of those who pretend to derive their religion from them, *all* christians are unavoidably considered by them as guilty of *polytheism* and *idolatry*. And who can acquit them of the charges, so long as they profess to pay divine honours to *three persons*, and address their most solemn prayers, not to *one God the Father*, but to *Father, Son and Holy Ghost*? Many other corruptions might be mentioned connected with this, which altogether, make the whole system of modern christianity less like the christianity of the New Testament, than it is to the religion of the Brachmans of Indostan.

What I am saying is, perhaps, no news even to the generality of the members of

the established church. Many of them *feel* and *lament* the wretched state of things among them; and some of the clergy have, now and then, the courage to *propose* a reformation; but so long as the *civil power* continues to be the *supreme head* of this church, the first effectual motion must come from thence; and till there be some *state necessity* for setting about a reformation, the remonstrances of a thousand *candid disquisitors*, followed by as many *confession-alists*, will signify but little.

This *state necessity*, which alone can make our civil governors think of a reformation, must arise from the difficulty of carrying on the business of our present *politico-ecclesiastical constitution* without it. And so long as the laity are content with their clergy, and their *statute duty*; and so long as clergymen can be found, who are content to do this duty, and are satisfied with the *terms* on which they are required to do it (and without which they cannot receive the *reward* for doing it) it is very unlikely that the houses of parliament, who have business enough, of other kinds, upon their hands, will ever take this affair into consideration.



In order to engage their attention to this subject, therefore, both the clergy and the laity must *act*, as well as *think* and *write*. The laity must *dissent*, and quit those places of worship in which they are convinced that divine service is not conducted according to truly christian principles; and the clergy must throw up the preferments which they *received*, and which they, therefore, *hold* upon their solemnly declared assent to doctrines which they disbelieve, and upon their approbation of a ritual which they dislike.

Should either of these two events happen (both of which, however, are, to the last degree improbable) that the laity, in general, should be so far enlightened, as to see the errors of the established religion, and at the same time so strictly conscientious, as to think it their duty not to give any countenance to those corruptions of christianity, by their presence at the service, and their concurrence in it; or should the generality of the clergy, for the same just reasons, relinquish their preferments, to teach a purer religion, without expecting their recompence from man; the king of England, and the two houses of parliament, would see it to be high  
time

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time to attend to this subject, and a reformation of the greatest abuses, at least, would immediately take place.

But my business is not with the *established church*. I thank God, the cause I am pleading is not quite so hopeless. I have not to do with fettered churchmen, but with *free dissenters*; and it is, confessedly, not so difficult to persuade men to continue as they are, as to engage them to change their situation.

While there are dissenters from civil establishments of religion; that is, while there are men who are not *hired*, and who do not lie under any temptation, to prostitute their consciences in the support of falsehood, there will be freedom of enquiry, unchecked by the apprehension of consequences; freedom of enquiry will produce its natural offspring, truth; and truth has charms, that require only to be seen and known, in order to recommend itself to the acceptance of all mankind. Darkness and prejudice cannot always involve the minds of men; and if truth once begin to dawn upon them, it will be as the *morning light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*.

Learn, then, my protestant dissenting  
brethren

brethren, to regard your situation with respect; when you consider, that among you alone, in this country, is the worship of the only living and true God known, and the purity of the christian doctrine and discipline exhibited. Errors, no doubt, and perhaps great ones too, still remain among the most enlightened of us, but we have no reason to be alarmed at the suspicion. We are at liberty to make the most rigid scrutiny into the foundation of our religious principles. We may instantly rectify what we find amiss, and may, without restraint, use our endeavours to enlighten the minds of others. We have subscribed to no systems, or articles of faith, and therefore have no formal recantation to make upon the occasion. We enjoy no emoluments in consequence of our assent to any religious opinions or practices; and, therefore, are under no temptation to equivocate with our consciences (which are apt to prove intractable, and are seldom perfectly easy under that kind of treatment) to avoid the disagreeable alternative of giving up a church living, when we are convinced that the doctrines we have subscribed to, upon our induction into it are erroneous, and that the discipline we  
have



have conformed to, is inexpedient, or dangerous.

This last circumstance, I am sensible, chiefly affects *ministers*; but if you, gentlemen of the *laity* among dissenters, think yourselves unconcerned in it, you are greatly mistaken. Being men of a liberal turn of mind in other respects, condemning no man for his religious opinions, and being fully satisfied that honest men of all professions, cannot but stand well in the favour of their maker, you are apt to pursue these just sentiments too far; and to think that, because there is no harm to *them* in their worship, there is no harm to *you* in it; so that by joining in what is good, and neglecting what is bad, you may, without the violation of your consciences, and without any inconvenience, join in a constant way with any sect of protestants whatever, in the celebration of divine worship. But consider, that upon the very same principles, you might join with any sect of christians, and even join in the service of the *mass* in a constant way. Upon the same principles, also, you might neglect all the forms of christian worship, and join yourselves to the Jews or the Mohammedans; for it cannot be denied, but that

that there is something good to be found among them, and this you may pretend to take, and neglect the rest.

In short, this specious principle, founded, in appearance, on generous sentiments of moderation and candour, is a most fallacious and dangerous one. By the help of it the primitive christians might have joined the worship of the heathens; there needed to have been no martyrs in the christian church, and all *persecution for the cross of Christ* would have ceased.

Many of the old Puritans, indeed, constantly attended divine worship in the church of England; but there were no other places of public worship open; and they thought it their duty to give their testimony in favour of religion and christianity in general, by joining in the best forms that they conveniently could. Besides, it should be considered, that the old puritans did not object to the doctrines of the church of England, or to forms of prayer, but only to ceremonies, and matters relating to discipline; nay, many of them had no great objection to the ceremonies *in themselves*, but only to the *imposition* of them; which they justly thought was owning a power, which Christ had not com-

committed to man. But, my brethren, your objections now lie much deeper, and affect the very essentials of the established worship.

Do not say that I inherit the rigid scrupulosity of my ancestors. On the contrary, I think it extreme bigotry never to indulge a liberal curiosity, so far as, in the character of a *spectator*, to see in what manner persons of other denominations conduct divine worship. I have frequently gone to church myself, and do not scruple to go sometimes still, though I am shocked at what I hear there; but, certainly, by joining *habitually* with any one denomination of christians, we declare our preference of it to any other, especially to any other that it would be as convenient for us to attend; and whatever errors and irregularities there are in that church more than in any other, we, by our conduct, give our sanction to them, and, as far as our influence extends, recommend and enforce them.

If, therefore, you be a believer in the one true God *the Father*, and in other respects, maintain the purity of the gospel principles; you not only expose your own minds to perpetual disquiet and uneasiness,  
by



by habitually joining in the service of the established church; which is, throughout, founded on principles very different from yours; but christianity in general is offended at your conduct, as you virtually oppose all reformation, and contribute to entail all its errors and abuses upon it. Indeed, I cannot help thinking, that a man who is properly in earnest in religion, who considers of what importance genuine christianity is, and how exceedingly unlike to it is the whole system on which the English hierarchy is founded, must be staggered when he weighs these things in his own mind.

Going to church in a constant way, is not going in the character of a *spectator*. If you be observed to be there constantly, you will be supposed to *prefer* that method of worship. You will, likewise, be supposed not only to be *seeing* what is done there, but also to have something to *do* yourselves. You are supposed to join in the prayers of the church; and, therefore, to pay divine worship to inferior and derived beings, as if they were the *true and very God*; which is certainly undisguised impiety and idolatry.

Think not that this species of idolatry,  
though

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though not so malignant as some other species of it, is, therefore, *innocent*; and that it has no *practical consequences*. The ascription of divine honours to Jesus Christ, besides robbing *his God and our God* of the honour that is due to himself alone, and of *the glory which he will not give to another*, is a dangerous depravation of the idea of God. By making more Gods than one, you unavoidably make a distribution of divine attributes; so that the all-perfect character of deity will be found in none of them, and no being will be left possessed at the same time of all the venerable and amiable attributes that we ought to ascribe to him; by which means the purity and genuine spirit of devotion will be greatly debased. And there is no doubt, a near connexion between this opinion of the proper divinity of Christ, and other notions held by some christians, which imply the greatest reflection upon the moral government of God; and, as far as they operate, must be prejudicial to virtue among men.

So unlike to genuine primitive christianity are all the ecclesiastical establishments in Europe, and so much in the spirit of this world are they conducted, that it is no wonder that persons who inquire but  
little

little, and who judge of christianity by what they see, are, so many of them, unbelievers. By joining these corrupt establishments, therefore, you promote the cause of infidelity; whereas by joining with a society of christians, who profess the gospel in its original simplicity; or, at least, are in a situation in which they are at liberty to bring it to that simplicity, you bear your testimony against all the corruptions of this divine religion; you represent it in an amiable light to mankind; and without speaking or writing in its defence, are advocates for the truth, and preachers of righteousness in the world.

If this be to be a dissenter, it is certainly a respectable and important character. Learn then, my brethren, to reverence your profession, and consider it as a thing that is as much superior to any ecclesiastical establishment, as a scheme which has an eternal world for its object, is superior to all schemes of worldly policy; as much superior to them, as Christ, whom alone you acknowledge to be your legislator, is superior to the princes and powers of this world, whom those who adhere to establishments acknowledge as their legislators.

Dissenters in England are often confounded



founded with the Presbyterians of the *kirk of Scotland*; and time was when those who go by the name of *Presbyterians* in England entertained the same principles, and would have been glad, either to have united with them, or to have formed themselves upon the same, or a similar plan. Mr. Pierce dedicated his *Vindication of the Dissenters* to the pastors and ministers of the church of Scotland, calling them *Brethren*, and saying that the dissenters in England were united to them in the same *faith, worship, form of government, design, and brotherly love*. But divine providence happily prevented the execution of what our forefathers earnestly desired, and has brought the dissenters in England into a situation infinitely more favourable to the interests of truth and christianity, than they had any idea of themselves.

We are, now, far from admitting that the members of the church of Scotland are any more our brethren, than the members of the church of England. A charge of any alliance with the Scotch presbyterians would now be considered as a calumny; and if we were disposed to conform to an establishment, we should not look so far North. The two establish-  
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ments in the island differ in little more than matters of *discipline*, which we now think to be of little consequence, in comparison of those errors in *doctrine*, which lie at the very foundation of the christian scheme; errors in which they both agree, and which they both enforce with the same unrelenting rigour. And there is not much more prospect of things growing better in the one than in the other.

The great advantage which the church of Scotland enjoys over the church of England, arose from this single, but important circumstance, that the former was prompted and conducted by the *people*, who had nothing but religion in view, and who carried their scheme as far as they thought proper; whereas the latter was conducted by the *civil magistrate*, who went no farther in reformation than he could help, and modelled the government of the church, so as to make it subservient to the purposes of the state.

Hence the Scotch ministers have all decent and moderate salaries; they have little or no civil power, and pluralities are unknown among them; while there remains a shameful inequality in the provision for the English ministers, some living  
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ing in affluence in palaces, and adding one large benefice to another, while others of them are absolutely starving on miserable curacies; and, notwithstanding an ample sufficiency in the revenues of the church, are obliged to depend upon the voluntary contributions of their parishioners, for a necessary support. Here, also, the bishops, along with the revenues of princes, have an extensive *jurisdiction*, and great civil power; and while the bishopricks, and, in a manner, all the great benefices are, directly or indirectly, at the disposal of the court, a ministry, be they ever so corrupt, can never want tools to assist them in carrying on their most iniquitous and oppressive schemes. Witness the slavish and absurd doctrines of *passive obedience* and *non-resistance*, so furiously inculcated by, I may say, the body of the English clergy in the arbitrary reigns of the Stewarts.





## SECTION II.

*Of the Importance of the Dissenting Interest,  
with Respect to the civil Interests of the  
Community.*

HAVING considered the importance of the dissenting interest with respect to *religion*, I shall now briefly treat of it as it respects *civil policy*. Mr. Hume acknowledges, that whatever civil liberty is now enjoyed in this country, it is owing to our ancestors the Puritans, who were equally friends to the civil and religious rights of their countrymen. For my own part, I cannot say that I consider them as having been uniform and consistent friends to either; but their schemes being thwarted by the court, they were necessarily engaged in the opposite interest; and thus, from the mere force of oppression, without any greater enlargement of mind, or superior merit, they became advocates for liberty. But still it was only liberty for themselves and, their own party, that they aimed at; and, could they have carried their point, they would have exercised as severe  
a tyranny

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a tyranny over the consciences of men as their antagonists. Were they now in power, I myself should expect to be one of the first victims to their bigotry and rage. It must be acknowledged, however, in favour of these *heroes*, that intolerance was the error of their times, and that no other professors of christianity had any more liberal, or enlarged views than themselves.

But whatever were the views of the dissenters originally, though they were extremely narrow and confined at first, they have been so long the weaker party, and consequently in an interest opposite to the views of tyranny and arbitrary power; that, at length, they have begun to understand their situation, and have found the true and just principles, on which the cause of *universal liberty* may be best supported. On these principles, my brethren, I trust you will always act, without troubling yourselves to make any apology for the maxims and conduct of our ancestors. If they were culpable, let them bear the censures they deserve. We must think, and act for ourselves.

So long as we continue dissenters, it is hardly possible that we should be other than friends to the civil liberty, and all the es-

sential interests of our fellow citizens. The friends of this great cause may always depend upon us; but statesmen who have other views may justly be jealous of us; and they cannot give a clearer proof of their hostile intentions towards the liberty of their country, than by using us with rigour. Witness the severe persecution we suffered in the arbitrary reigns of the Stewarts, the measures that were taking with us towards the close of the reign of queen Ann, and the indulgence that has been shown us since the happy revolution, under king William of glorious memory.

In all this, we claim no particular merit. Dissenting ministers, being chosen by their people, will naturally enter into the views of their people, in civil as well as religious matters; and the dissenting laity, not being noblemen, or men of very large fortunes, will have in general, the same interest with the bulk of their fellow subjects. Dissenting ministers, therefore, as far as their influence in a political light is of any consequence, will naturally enter into the interest of the people at large. It is for the same reason that the established clergy may be supposed to favour the court, as it has the disposal of bishopricks and rich benefices,



fices. The maxim *No bishop, no king*, i. e. no arbitrary king, might justly have had weight with wiser princes than our James the first.

It is also natural for the dissenters to wish well to every mild administration, which secures to them their privileges, and opposes the attempts of a bigotted and headstrong multitude, of clergy or laity, to oppress them. For the same reason, too, when the country, by its established laws, favours the interest of the dissenters, so that they have a *legal right* to their privileges, they naturally consider *their country*, and *its laws*, as their guardians, and will strenuously oppose all the encroachments of the prerogative on the constitution, and on the rights of the subjects in general. For they must be sensible, that the established laws of a free community must be a better security for their privileges, than the will of any single man whatever. They have too much at stake to be willing to hold it on so precarious a tenure.

It also clearly follows, from the same principle of *self-interest*, independent of gratitude, that the more indulgence dissenters meet with from the government, the stronger will be their attachment to it.

Though, therefore, it should seem proper to the legislature to give a preference to one mode of religion, by a legal provision for the maintenance of its ministers, it is clearly for its interest to attach all dissenters to it, as much as possible by a participation of *civil privileges*; and it is both injustice, and bad policy, in civil governors, to debar themselves from the service of men of ability and integrity, and, at the same time, to alienate their affections, by such an *opprobrious exclusion* from civil honours.

Yet, though I think it right that these things should be publicly said, that they may have weight with those whom it may concern, far would I be from encouraging the least tendency towards disaffection in the dissenters to the present constitution of England. Imperfect as it is, and hard as the present laws bear upon us dissenters in some respects, our situation in England is, upon the whole, such as we have great reason to be thankful to divine providence for, being abundantly more eligible than it would be in any other country in the world; and it is not so desirable to obtain even a just right by clamour and contention, as by the continuance of a prudent and peaceable behaviour.

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This may convince our legislators, that we are deserving of their indulgence. Men who harbour no resentment, though under a restraint, of the injustice and unreasonableness of which they are fully sensible, must be possessed of generosity enough to be capable of the most grateful and firm attachment to the hand that frees them from the restraint. If a man have magnanimity enough not to bear malice against an enemy, much more will he be susceptible of a generous zeal for his friend.

Besides, though, from a regard to the honour and interest of our country, it is to be wished that dissenters might be admitted to all civil offices of honour and trust, in common with others, their fellow-subjects, who have no better title to them in other respects: yet a person who should consult the interest of the dissenters only, as a body of men who separate themselves from a principle of *religion*, without regard to the interest of the community at large, might, perhaps, hesitate about taking any steps to procure an enlargement of their privileges.

Professing a religion which inculcates upon us that we are *not of this world*, but only in a course of discipline, to train us up



for a better, it is worth considering, whether a situation, in which more scope would be given to ambition, and other passions, the tendency of which is to attach us to this world, is to be wished for by us. Should not a christian, as such (though he should by no means secrete himself from society, or decline any opportunity of serving his friend or his country, when divine Providence seems to call him out to the sphere of active life) be content to pass unmolested in the private walks of life, rejoicing, as his master did, in doing all kind offices to his fellow creatures, without aspiring at civil power, and those honorary distinctions, with which the hearts of the men of this world are so much captivated, and, very often, so fatally insnared.

As our Lord warned his disciples, that *the world would love its own*, and would hate them, because they were not of the world, and that he who would follow him, must *take up his cross* to do it; is it not, *caeteris paribus*, more probable, that we are these disciples, when we suffer some degree of persecution, and are rather frowned upon by the powers of this world, than if we had free access to all the emoluments of it? Certainly, such a situation is far more favourable

favourable to our gaining that superiority of mind to the world, which is required of all christians, whatever be their station in it. We know that *if persecution should arise, on account of the word*, we must be ready to forsake houses, lands, relations, and all the endearments of life, rather than make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience; and that, in those trying times, if we deny Christ, he will also deny us. Then he that would save his life, shall lose it, and he only that is willing to lose his life, shall save it to life eternal. This, christians, is the tenure on which we hold all the blessings of the gospel.

Now, if this be the temper to which we are to be formed, whether persecution should actually arise, or not, what kind of a situation should we (from the knowledge we have of human nature) prescribe, as the most favourable for the purpose? Certainly, not one in which we should have nothing to bear or to suffer, and in which every thing should be just as we could wish it. A mind accustomed to this treatment would be ill-prepared for encountering the various hardships of the christian warfare, in a time of persecution. In a situation in every respect favourable to the pursuits and enjoy-

ments of this life, it would not be easy for a man to attain to any thing like a satisfactory conviction, that he had the proper temper and disposition of a christian. Habits of mind are not acquired by *putting cases* (which, however, persons would little think of doing, when the cases were not likely to occur) but by actual experience and feeling. A habit of caution can never be given to a child by admonition only. It is by frequent hurts that he learns to take care of himself. So likewise courage and fortitude are acquired by being frequently exposed to pains and hardships, by exerting our powers, and feeling the benefit of such exertion.

All these things duly considered, a man who entertains the truly enlarged sentiments of christianity, and is sensible how momentary and insignificant are all the things of this world, in comparison with those of a future, will, in proportion to the influence of these views, be less impatient of the difficulties and restraints he may lie under in a civil capacity. He will more easily acquiesce in a situation not perfectly eligible, when he is prepared even to bear the greatest sufferings that can befall him in this life with christian fortitude, patience, and resignation ;



signation; at the same time that the benevolence of his heart is always ready to take the form of the most generous patriotism, whenever there occurs a clear, and great cause to exert it. If a true christian be conscious that he is engaged in a good cause, he, of all men, has the least reason to fear *what man can do unto him*, and therefore he is more to be depended upon, in any critical emergence, than any other person whatever.

A dissenter, then, who is so *upon principle*, who has, consequently, the justest notions of the nature and importance of civil and religious liberty; who is, on many accounts, thoroughly sensible of the blessings of a mild and equal government, and, therefore, heartily attached to the interest of that constitution which allows him the rights which he values so highly; whose mind is prepared to bear *irremediable* hardships with patience, but whose active courage, in cases in which the great interests of his country call him to exert himself, may be depended upon, is a very valuable member of civil society. Such a man will scorn the mean arts of court intrigue. If he can gain his laudable ends, and be admitted to his natural rights, as a loyal Bri-

-tish subject, by fair and open means, he will not despise it; but he will rather continue to suffer unjustly, than prostitute his interest to a corrupt, profligate, and oppressive administration.

### SECTION III.

*Of the manner in which Dissenters ought to speak or write concerning the Church of England.*

**S**O long as persons are *sincere* in their profession of any form of religion, they are certainly intitled to our candour and respect. Integrity is the chief excellence of every moral agent, and claims our esteem and veneration even in a papist, a mahometan, or an heathen. The man who loves and seeks after truth, and who conscientiously obeys it, wherever he but thinks he has found it, will, no doubt, be accepted of God, though his faith should happen to be ever so erroneous, and his practice, founded upon it, ever so absurd. And without the christian virtues of mutual love, candour, and forbearance, the soundest christian faith will stand for nothing.

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The truth of these sentiments is acknowledged, felt, and contended for, by the author of this address; and by some he will be blamed for extending the benefit of them to papists and infidels. But let us, with a due regard to truth and sincerity, consider in what manner they ought to influence our conduct with respect to those who differ from us in religious principles and practices.

If the truth which we hold, and which others deny, appear to us to be of importance, and especially of practical importance (as certainly those opinions are which divide the rational dissenters from the church of England) our love of truth, and of mankind should concur to make us zealous in taking every prudent method to convince them of their errors, and make them converts to the truth; by setting the evidence and importance of the latter in its just light, and by no means concealing the absurdity and dangerous tendency of the former.

Upon every fair occasion, therefore, let the rational dissenter speak and write with the simplicity and fearless integrity of a christian, openly asserting the great doctrines of the proper unity of God,



and the equity of his moral government, in opposition to what is in reality *tritbeism*, and the doctrines of absolute predestination and reprobation by whomsoever they may be held; and let us claim for ourselves and others that equal *liberty*, to which we have a natural and a divine right, of thinking and acting for ourselves in all religious matters, whoever they be that would abridge us of it, by assuming authority in matters of faith. In every other respect, also, in which our opinions and practices are different from those of others, let us, if we have occasion to mention them at all, speak or write with perfect freedom, and with a degree of zeal proportioned to their importance.

Many of the modern friends of church power in England affect to allow dissenters to *think* for themselves, but deny them the liberty of *writing* against the establishment; and many dissenters also seem to enter into the same absurd distinction. If they can be permitted quietly to enjoy their own opinion and mode of worship, they think it wrong even to speak disrespectfully of the religion of their country, notwithstanding the greatest insults and provocations. They even take upon themselves to be offended with

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with any person who shall so much as make the least comparison with respect to the state of religious knowledge in the two parties, in order to shew the advantage of the situation of one of them, for improvements in religion, above that of the other. But what does common sense, the practice of the primitive christians, and that of the reformers from popery, say upon this subject?

Can any man maintain the truth of his own opinion, without shewing the absurdity of that which is directly contrary to it, and especially if he be in such a situation, that he must expressly deny what another has previously asserted? How then can I exhort dissenters to value their situation *as such*, if I do not shew them how much it is preferable to that of those from whom they dissent? It may, perhaps, be possible for a person exceedingly well skilled in the art of writing and *finesse*, to do the one without the other; but it is impossible he should do the one without *thinking* of the other, and even keeping it constantly in view; and certainly to suppress what a man thinks, especially when it is that which alone can give any weight, energy, or even propriety to what he is saying, must be a mode of  
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writing constrained, artificial, unnatural, and ineffectual.

The primitive christians appear to have known nothing of this refined distinction, but in their apologies for christianity inveighed with the utmost freedom against the established religions of the countries in which they lived. Paul did the same, without the least scruple or reserve, upon all occasions; as also did his and our great master; who never spared the absurd and mischievous doctrines that prevailed in his time, to the corruption of a true and divine religion. And the reformers from popery followed their example, in expressing upon all occasions, their honest indignation against the absurdities and usurpations of the church of Rome.

Why then should not we, who dissent from the Church of England, as they did from the church of Rome, take the same liberty, in proportion to their importance, with her absurdities and usurpations. If we think that the church of England is *not* chargeable with such things, we are not dissenters, and ought not to continue the separation. On the other hand, if we think that the church of England is chargeable with great errors, and unjustifiable usurpations, and  
scruple



scruple to say so, we have not that zeal for truth and liberty that becomes dissenters; I may add that becomes christians.

But the present age, verging to infidelity, and an indifference to all the forms of religion, and to religion itself, brands with the censure of *unpoliteness*, every thing that looks like molesting the religious opinions of others, be they ever so erroneous or dangerous; and the man who thinks, feels, and writes like a christian; who loves his religion, and values the purity of it; and who expresses his generous indignation at the usurpations of some, and the servility of others with respect to it, must be called a *bigot*, and an *illiberal minded* person. With such may I ever be deemed a bigot. I shall be proud of the character, and shall begin to think bigotry to be a term synonymous to integrity, honesty, generosity, and every thing that is manly and liberal belonging to human nature.

These specious principles, which have their source in *infidelity*, have infected many members of the church of England, and dissenters also, who are not, at least, *not yet* unbelievers. But certainly such dissenters are least acquainted with the true principles of their dissent, and must be the

least *valuable*, and the least *stable* part of the interest. Accordingly, we see that those dissenters, who speak with this extreme tenderness, charity, and respect concerning the church of Eng<sup>l</sup>and (notwithstanding, if they were asked, they could not deny their disbelief of more of her principles than any other denomination of dissenters) find the least difficulty in conforming to the church; and for the same reason, would find as little difficulty in joining the church of Rome, the church of Mahomet, or any church in the world; and their minds would be as little shocked with the idea of even *constant conformity* to any of them. For it supposes only the same disregard to religious truth, and the rights of conscience.

But let such persons consider how, as I have observed before, and cannot repeat too often, with this excess of candour, and supineness of conscience, any of the primitive christians could ever have died *martyrs* to their religion; or whether there could have been any such thing as *persecution for the cross of Christ*?

The doctrine of toleration and religious liberty is now maintained on two very different, and even opposite grounds. The  
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one is an *indifference to all religion*, and an opinion of the absolute insignificance of all the distinctions of it; and the other its exceeding great *importance* to every man singly considered; so that every thing belonging to it is held sacred with him, and he cannot, upon any consideration, surrender his own right of determining concerning it, to any man, or body of men, upon earth.

Those who are advocates for toleration upon the former ground, are *unbelievers in christianity*, and persons who are governed by political considerations only; who think it folly to disturb the peace of society for the sake of trifles, and who have seen in history how much several states have been injured by adopting persecuting measures. But, upon the same principles, these persons would not scruple to give up all regard to those insignificant opinions, and pretended rights of conscience, if they saw that the outward splendor, power, and wealth of the state required it. These unbelieving statesmen have, therefore, within them the principles of the coolest and most unrelenting persecution; and, without believing one syllable of the matter, are capable of conforming



forming themselves, and of enforcing the strictest obedience in others, to any scheme of religion in the world. Nay the Bishop of Gloucester, Dr. Balguy, and others, who are not infidels, avowedly go upon this ground, and maintain even the *obligation* of the civil magistrate to establish the religion of the majority of his subjects, without making any distinction with respect to the possibility of its being ever so impious or absurd. Certainly such principles as these are highly dangerous and alarming, and yet they are spreading every day.

On the other hand, those who are advocates for religious liberty upon the other ground, namely, an opinion of the exceeding great importance of religious principles, are sincere *believers* of christianity, and the farthest in the world from thinking that religion is a thing to be regulated by, and made subservient to civil policy, when no considerations relating to this world are worthy to be named with it. In a thing so interesting, it is their opinion, that every man, for himself, should be the sole umpire of his own judgment and practice, acknowledging *no master upon earth*, since *one is their master, even Christ.*

*Christ.* And least of all will they submit their faith and practice in matters of religion to the decision of men, who, on account both of their education, and situation in life, must be very incompetent judges of the subject; and who, in fact, have never had its interest at heart; but, in all their ecclesiastical constitutions, have been solely influenced by political and worldly considerations. To those who assert their religious liberty upon these principles, the authority of the Pope, or that of the king of England, with the impious titles of *supreme heads of the church*; are held in equal contempt\*.

These principles can never, like the former, degenerate in a persecution, for, with such men, the conscience of every individual of their species will be as inviolable as their own; and upon the same principles that they feel for themselves, they cannot but feel for others.

Formerly religious liberty had no proper advocates upon either of these grounds. Even the dissenters, who thought religion to be of importance, imagined that it was,

\* This is by no means intended to deny the authority of temporal sovereigns over all persons within their dominions, ecclesiastical as well as others.

on that very account, not to be deserted by those who were in possession of the civil power, and that the best interests of mankind ought to be taken care of in spite of themselves. But of late, the absurdity and dangerous tendency of this principle has been acknowledged, at least by the rational dissenters; and they have become advocates for religious liberty upon the true, broad, generous, and christian principles above mentioned.

But sorry I am to see too many of those who are called *rational dissenters*, talk more like *infidels* than *christians* upon this great subject, and treat the most important religious truths with the same contemptuous indifference. They are forward to acknowledge, upon all occasions, that all the difference between them and the established church is a mere trifle; that the belief of *three*, or *three hundred gods* is only a metaphysical subtlety, of no practical consequence whatever; and that even the doctrines of absolute election and reprobation are well enough for the common people, who will always be foolish and superstitious, and whom it is not worth the while to take any pains with, or to run any risque to set right. With this declared

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ed indifference to systems of religion, it is no wonder that they are disposed to think favourably of establishments in general, and of that of their own country in particular; and that they are offended when any person, more serious and in earnest than themselves, asserts the true dissenting principles, with a warmth and zeal suited to their importance.

I was in hopes, that this disposition, so unworthy of christians, and especially of protestant dissenters, had been confined to a few, who might have learned their principles of toleration from Voltaire or Rousseau; but several circumstances have occurred of late, and particularly the reception which the former edition of this *Address* has met with, which give but too much reason to suspect, that the evil has spread farther than I had imagined. For I cannot conceive that any persons should be much offended either at the *sentiments* or the *manner* of this Address, except those who (though perhaps unknown to themselves) are influenced by such principles as I have here animadverted upon. In this view the unpopularity of this Address, among those dissenters for whose use it was particularly intended, gives me serious concern.

concern. For their sakes it is that, in this edition, I have added the reflections which are the subject of this section, and to which I wish they would give their attention, with the same seriousness with which they were written.

If there be no weight in what I have observed, do you, with equal plainness, produce your own *strong reasons* against me; but, for God's sake, do not, my brethren, in a case of this importance, determine and act without thinking, or influenced by such superficial sentiments, as have weight with none but men of *pleasure and fashion*, who never properly think about religion; who, consequently, know nothing of the subject, and therefore can be no judges of its importance, or of the manner in which it ought to affect the hearts and the conduct of reasonable beings.

Believe me, I feel nothing for the credit of a short *and anonymous composition*, but, if I know my own heart, I feel for you, I feel for the *cause to which you give your names*; and I hope that I feel still more for that *great cause*, from its relation to which only every inferior denomination of religion derives its value and importance. And the turn of thinking, the prevalence

valence of which I lament, appears to me to be diametrically opposite to the genuine spirit of christianity; and would be so far from leading a man to do and to suffer what Christ, and his immediate followers did, that it would rather dispose him to ridicule them, as men who *turned the world upside down* for the sake of mere *speculative opinions*, and who could not be content *to think with the wise, and act with the vulgar*. This, which is known to have been the spirit both of the *heathen philosophy* of old, and of *infidelity* in modern times, is too like the principle of many professing christians, and even those who call themselves rational dissenters. They are so much alike, that one of them is certainly the parent, and the other the child.

But, my brethren, if there be any thing sacred in *religious truth*, let it inspire the breasts of us who profess to maintain it; and if any religious truths be of importance, as affecting a man's heart and life, or as comprehended under any definition that can be framed of *important truths*, several of them will certainly be found among those which we profess as dissenters, the very contrary of them being asserted among the thirty-nine articles of the church of England. If you have no zeal for the dissent-



dissenting interest, *as it now stands*, you must think your ancestors fools and mad to have set such a value upon it *as it stood in their times*. For, certainly, you cannot think the business of a *surplice*, to be equally worth contending for with the doctrine of the *divine unity*, or that we ought to object to *kneeling at the Lord's supper* as strenuously as against the doctrines of *absolute predestination* and *reprobation*, and others connected with them; and the principles of *liberty* among the old puritans were certainly narrow and confined in comparison with ours. As the cause of the dissenters has so greatly improved in *real value*, we ought certainly to encrease in our zeal for it and attachment to it; and to be more indifferent in these circumstances, as is apparently the case with many, must argue a want of thought, a want of knowledge, or of love for truth.

I do not write this to exasperate any man. I hope I shall not exasperate any serious member of the church of England. If he be serious and in earnest himself, he will excuse another, who thinks that he has equal cause to be serious and in earnest; and it is not with the truly *pious* and *worthy*, that even an intemperance of zeal, and *single expressions* that may appear incon-

inconsiderate and unjustifiable, that will make a man the object either of *anger* or of *ridicule*. Warm and ingenuous hearts will compare their own feelings with mine, and will make those allowances for me, which they would wish to have made for themselves.

With numbers in the established church, I believe, my heart is in perfect unison. With some of them I know, and feel it to be so. They are men who, if they do not approve of the whole system, make the best use of their situation, in employing their most earnest endeavours to bring about a reformation of whatever they are convinced is amiss in it; though their pious labours are counteracted by those *who yet let*, but who, it is to be hoped, will, in due time, be *taken out of the way*. With these persons, notwithstanding we may, in some respects, see each others situation in different lights, it is not possible that I should have any difference of consequence. It can only consist in the choice of means to gain the same great ends; so that, though the parts we are acting be considerably different, we must mutually rejoice in each other's success; and that sympathetic union of heart and objects, that has commenced here, will, I

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rust, be completed, and be a source of mutual congratulation and happiness hereafter.

#### SECTION IV.

*Observations on the Expence attending the Dissenting Interest.*

SOME of you, my brethren, I am afraid, are discouraged, and are ready to quit the dissenting interest, because it is *expensive* to you. You think it hard to be taxed by the government very high, and contrary to all principles of equity, in order to maintain the ecclesiastical establishment of your country, and at the same time raise salaries for the maintenance of your own ministers, besides being frequently called upon to contribute towards building meeting-houses, houses for ministers, funds for the education of ministers, for the relief of their widows, &c. &c. &c. I own that all these things are incident to you as dissenters; they are necessarily expensive, and, I think the times are such, that these necessary expences must rather increase than diminish. But this is not a thing to be complained of, if the cause be worth supporting at the expence; and I hope enough has been said already, to put that beyond a doubt.



I trust there are none among us of so fordid a disposition, as to think that nothing is worth money, but money itself, or such things as may be bought with it, in the ordinary method of traffic. The gift of God, said Peter to Simon Magus, is not to be purchased with money; but is a thing of unspeakably more value. And, certainly, useful truth of all kinds, and especially *religious truth*, though not to be bought with money, is of infinitely more value than money; and to be sparing of money, in a cause in which religion and truth may be promoted, is the most contemptible parsimony. *Liberty*, also, together with the other great natural rights of mankind, is to be ranked in the same class. They are things in which *price* has no concern, but they are *above all price*; and in a cause in which they are so clearly concerned, no man of a generous mind will ever repent of his expences, though he be not able to demonstrate what he has gained, by the method of *profit and loss*, in his books of accompt. You may not be so *rich* after such expences; but yourselves and your posterity, may be more *wise, free, and happy*.

Consider, my brethren, in what man-

ner christianity operated upon the minds of men when it was first promulgated. Of so little value did the primitive christians think the things of this world, in comparison of the great cause of christianity, that, without any command from God, they made no difficulty of throwing every thing they had into a common stock, to be applied to the advantage of the common cause, at the discretion of certain stewards, chosen by themselves for that purpose. They were men so detached from this world, and had their views so much fixed upon another, that they thought the best use they could make of all their possessions here, was to make them subservient to their interest hereafter. They set no bounds to the application of this rule, concerning *the true use of riches*. They gave *all they had*, and kept nothing back. And did the circumstances of christianity at present require it, we should not deserve the name of christians, if we hesitated a moment about doing the same.

But though there be no occasion to do what they did, let us follow the same rule. They did what their times required; let us do what our times require, and do it without grudging. You can never dis-  
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pose of your wealth in a manner that will give more satisfaction to a mind that sees things in their true light, than by making it subservient to the interests of truth, liberty, and genuine christianity; and this, I believe, is the cause I am pleading, when I plead that of the protestant dissenting interest in England and Ireland.

I do not, however, suppose that the circumstances the dissenting interest is in at present, by any means require, that you should materially injure your fortunes, or your families, in its support. It will be abundantly sufficient, if your expences on this head only come near those you actually do make on other accounts, which yourselves, if you were asked, would acknowledge to be of less use; and *so far* the dissenting interest has a just claim upon you; and you are debtors to the cause of truth and liberty, if you have hitherto done less. The obligation to contribute in cases of this nature, is, by no means, the less, because it can never be defined what particular sum, or what proportion of your fortune, you ought to expend. In this respect, no person has a right to tax you, nor may you be able to fix any exact bounds to yourselves. It is the same



in cases of common charity, and a variety of other things, of which instances occur every day, which are all of *unquestionable*, though of indefinite, and various obligation; and with respect to which, the generous will act generously, and the mean-spirited will, like themselves, act meanly.

It may assist you to feel, and act with propriety upon this occasion, to consider what your heroic ancestors did and suffered in the same cause, and how much you owe to their liberality. How many hundreds and thousands of the old puritans, men of *whom the world was not worthy*, bore with chearfulness *the spoiling of their goods*, and submitted to heavy fines and confiscations, till they were absolutely impoverished, rather than relinquish what they were persuaded was the cause of *truth and liberty*, and therefore *the cause of God*.

Consider how many years they bore cruel imprisonments, under which numbers of them languished and died, in the imperious reign of queen Elizabeth, and the more oppressive reigns of the Stewarts; so that many men of opulent fortunes, who were qualified to make a figure in their native country, were glad to take refuge from the storm of persecution,

on the then inhospitable coasts of *North-America*, exposed to an inclement climate, and the fury of intractable savages (but who had more compassion than the hackneyed tools of a wicked administration at home) glad, at this risque, to procure what they thought the invaluable privilege of worshipping their Maker according to the dictates of their consciences, unmolested.

Consider the glorious scene that was exhibited on the ever memorable St. Bartholomew, A. D. 1662, a scene which few countries besides England can boast of, when *two thousand* ministers did not hesitate to throw up their church preferments, many of them without any other resource, rather than violate their consciences, by complying beyond their sentiments in religious matters. And this they did, though many of the things imposed upon them were acknowledged to be, in themselves, matters of indifference. Of so much consequence did they justly think it, not to admit a *right* in any men, or body of men, whatever, of prescribing and imposing any thing, with respect to that religion, of which Christ alone is the supreme head; so as by law to make that

necessary, which he left indifferent. What would they have felt, and how would they have acted, had their minds been enlightened as ours are now; and, consequently, had they been persuaded, that they were not only required to submit to the impositions of men in matters of religion, but to the imposition of a form of worship, which, besides containing many articles of faith, the very reverse of the most important doctrines of genuine christianity, as delivered in the New Testament, derogated from the sacred rights of the only living and true God, and was therefore idolatrous.

Consider, my brethren, the vast sums your ancestors began to expend, the moment they gained a little respite from the persecution above mentioned, exhausted as they then were, in erecting places of worship, in the liberal support of their ministers, and also in the endowments they made, of lands and houses, in order to provide for the continuance of that method of worship which they approved; and the benefit of which we enjoy at this day.

If you ask how they were able to supply those expences, I answer, that they thought the interest in which they were engaged,



engaged, of so much consequence, that they were hardly at any other extraordinary expences. They were men who had no taste for the fashionable and expensive pleasures of the age in which they lived. From the highest to the lowest, they were men of the greatest frugality, and the most indefatigable industry in their several employments; which, through the blessing of God, proved a never-failing resource for the many and large demands that were made upon them for the common cause. For these virtues your ancestors were so greatly distinguished in those times, that though they were almost all of them concerned in trade, a bankrupt was not known among them for many years. When instances of this kind did happen, so strict was their church discipline, and so heinous did they consider the vices which they thought to have been instrumental in bringing men's affairs to that catastrophe, that excommunication certainly followed upon it; nor could the bankrupt be restored to church communion, till he had clearly demonstrated, that he had not been guilty of fraud, extravagance, or want of industry; but that his misfortune was the act of God.

I wish, my brethren, you would review the history of the great worthies, from whom you have the honour to be descended. Warm your hearts with the recollection of what they did and suffered, imitate their laudable industry, adopt their generous zeal; retrench, like them, the superfluous expences of a frivolous and luxurious age; and be liberal, as they were, in the cause of religion, liberty, and truth.

Give me leave to represent to you those circumstances, in the present state of the dissenting interest, and particularly of its ministers, which make a considerable expence absolutely necessary to support the cause, and without which that part of the interest which is most liberal, and worthy of support, must necessarily decline. The interest in which you are engaged cannot be respectable, unless your ministers be men of a liberal education, and feel themselves in a situation, in which they may freely think and act, as themselves shall judge the cause of christianity, and your interest demand. This, you must be sensible, requires not only a liberal education, but likewise a *liberal support*.

If you say that the ministers of the last  
age

age had smaller salaries than those of the present, you say what is true, but you deceive yourselves at the same time. They did not receive so much as a *fixed stipend*; but, in many cases, their families were almost wholly maintained by the bounty of their hearers.

In short, ministers, in those days, being free from all anxiety about the things of this world, either on their own account, or that of their families, were at liberty to give their whole attention to the proper duties of their function; and notwithstanding ministers seem to have been more dependent upon their people, there never was a time in which ministers had more influence, and when their reproofs and censures were more feared. That this was very much the case formerly, I can appeal to the memory of many persons now living, or even to what is now the fact, in some parts of the kingdom, where the old customs have been religiously kept up.

At present, though the salaries of ministers have been considerably advanced, in comparison of what they were formerly, all other advantages are, in general, very inconsiderable, and, from the same causes, must be expected to grow more so.



Add to this, that, the price of all necessary provisions is prodigiously advanced all over England. Moreover the taste of living is much higher than it was, so that the expences which *custom*, at least, if not *nature* has made necessary, in their case, are more than double of what they were in the memory of man. On this account, the largest income of any dissenting minister is barely a decent maintenance for a family, without a possibility of laying up any thing for the use of a widow, or children, after his death. Indeed, a genteel congregation would think themselves disgraced by the mean house-keeping, dress, and appearance of their minister, or his family. It is unfortunate, also, that ministers, by being invited to the tables of their richer hearers, too often acquire a taste for high living themselves, a taste which it would be ruinous to them to gratify at home.

The consequence of these discouragements is a circumstance, which already begins to be very alarming to the dissenting interest. Formerly, when the ministry was more reputable, persons of some rank and fortune educated their sons for it. Many of these ministers, being easy in their circumstances,

cumstances, took no care about their salaries, and were so far from making a gain of godliness, or even being supported by the interest, that they contributed to its support, by preaching in places, in which the salary kept dwindling, till, after they died, a minister could not be supported. Many places have been intirely shut up in this manner.

So well known are the straits to which ministers and their families have often been reduced, that few are now educated with a view to it, except young persons, who have a turn for learning, and whose parents are unable to make any other provision for them. Even persons educated in this manner are fewer every year; for it is a low way of life indeed, that will not produce more *money*, which is the thing that the generality of parents chiefly consider; so that it is now no easy matter to find young persons to educate for the ministry, though it cost the parents little or nothing.

What, then, is likely to be the consequence of this deficiency of ministers liberally educated among the dissenters? The interest must grow less respectable, lay preachers, and persons of an enthusiastic turn of mind, and superficially instructed, will  
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grow more numerous, or vacancies among us must be supplied from Scotland; and *how* they are supplied from this quarter, let the state of the dissenting interest in the north of England testify. What religious principles are they, that we can expect to have brought among us by men who have subscribed *the Scotch confession of faith*, and *the Assembly's catechism*? Besides that, in general, only the very refuse of the country, and such as can get no preferment at home, can be expected to migrate into England. When I say this I leave room to suppose, and I know there are, many exceptions.

The only method by which these evils can be remedied, is to make the dissenting ministry an object worth the attention of persons of a liberal education, and this is only in the power of gentlemen of fortune to do. Exert yourselves, my brethren, for this purpose. Revive the zeal of your ancestors, and dispose of your superfluous wealth in this *good old cause*. Behave towards your ministers, not with a superstitious reverence, but with that respect which a regard to virtue, learning, and religion ought to enforce. Treat them with generosity, and exact no servile compliances from them; but consider them as your superiors.

periors with respect to office, whatever your rank in life may be, your equals as men and gentlemen, and your inferiors in nothing but what will always make fools and knaves superior to men of sense and virtue. There are many congregations of dissenters, which fully answer this description, nay which exceed whatever can be reasonably expected of them.

SECTION V.

*Advice to Ministers.*

WITH the same freedom with which I have treated the *laity* among us, I would subjoin a word of advice to the *ministers*. Propriety of conduct on your part will go a great way towards replacing your order in that respectable situation, in which I most heartily wish to see it. Imbibe the spirit of your religion, and of your office. Without adopting all the austerity of your predecessors, whose minds were made more severe by the hardships they had suffered, refrain from giving into the levities of the age in which we live. Let it be manifest that you are no lovers of what is called *pleasure*, or given to dissipation; that you are no slaves to your *appetite*, and have



have nothing of *conceit*, or *vanity*, with respect to your persons, your dress, or your talents. Avoid, also, all expensive shew in furniture and ornament of every kind.

This caution against giving into an excessive love of pleasure, and indulging a turn for gait and dissipation, which are so prevalent in the present age, is strongly enforced by a regard to your particular situation, as persons who pretend to *think* more freely than others. You are not unacquainted, that the popular cry against you is, that you *act* more freely too, and are less scrupulous with respect to propriety, decency, and moral strictness of behaviour; and the suspicion is not, altogether, without foundation. Such is the nature of man, that we are prone to run into extremes; so that, having once called in question the principles of our ancestors, we are too apt to think them to have been absurd and wrong in every thing. Indeed a great deal of their external strictness was certainly superstitious, and some of the good customs they kept up were, with respect to them, built on false principles. These, therefore, being thrown down, whatever rested upon them, how good soever in itself, falls with them.

But, being aware of this, let us, my brethren.

TO PROTESTANT DISSENTERS. 65

brethren, be upon our guard against the licentiousness of reformation. Let us not be precipitate, but endeavour to separate the *wheat* from the *chaff*; and, before we absolutely reject any thing, let us consider whether other, and better reasons may not be given for it, than those by which it has been enforced upon us. Having discarded every thing of superstition, and what is false and useless in religion, let us be the more zealous in the observance of what appears upon examination, to be genuine and useful.

I cannot help thinking that, in this case, the apostle's example, *to become all things to all men*; and his advice about the conduct of those who are strong towards those who are *weak*, should engage us to a conformity, at least for a time, in every thing that is innocent, to the prejudices of others. This we shall certainly do, if we mean to give to others a favourable opinion of ourselves, and of our principles; if we have any thoughts of winning upon them, and do not intend to exasperate them against us, and to induce them, from the mere spirit of opposition, to persist in obstinately holding their errors and prejudices.

Do not fail to inculcate these considerations

tions upon the *laity*, whose situation and circumstances lay them under less restraint than yourselves; and whose freedom from the prejudices of their ancestors is, in many cases, by no means to be placed to the account of a love of truth, or can be called the result of mature and serious examination. Many of them laugh at the strict observance of the Lord's day, and regularity in the times of public and private devotion, as *superstition*, and not necessarily connected with moral conduct. They sneer at the doctrines of a trinity in unity, original sin, predestination, and atonement, &c. because, at first view, they are mysterious and unintelligible; but from the same superficial turn of mind, they neglect the Lord's supper, discard family prayer, never catechize their children, and are apt to neglect devotion in all its forms. Because they think they need not *extirpate*, they will not so much as *restrain* their appetites; and dreading the imputation of preciseness and rigour, they abandon themselves to absolute licentiousness; so that having nothing about them whereby they can be distinguished as *christians*, they resemble, in all respects, the mere *men of this world*, and some of them even those *whose God is their belly, and*  
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*whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things only.*

Too many of these modern freethinkers, having indulged themselves, without reserve, in laughing at every thing they cannot comprehend, take it into their heads to be offended at the *Jewish religion*. They make no scruple to ridicule the divine mission and miracles of Moses; and after this it will not be wondered at, that they often reject the christian revelation also. To trace this fatal *unthinking* progress a little farther: still they will pretend to expect a future state of rewards and punishments, from the principles of the light of nature; but when once they have advanced thus far in infidelity, they are generally soon content to rank themselves with the beasts that perish; that is, they are, in fact, at least to all practical purposes, *Atheists*. And though, they may themselves, through the influence of good principles, and early habits, continue to live sober and respectable lives; their posterity, not having the same advantage; but, on the contrary, being brought up in great ignorance with respect to religion, and frequently hearing the great sanctions of virtue treated with ridicule, may be expected in many cases, (especially

pecially considering the bias of the present age) to be utterly profligate and abandoned.

When persons have, in this manner, thrown off all regard to religion, can it be supposed they will have any strong attachment to the *dissenting interest*? Some of them may continue to rank among us, from a regard to the principles of liberty, and other political considerations; but when *religion* makes no part of the tie, it may be expected, in general, that the laity will be governed, by their own secular interest; and if, through the influence of the same causes, a minister have become an unbeliever in the religion he professes to teach, I do not see why he may not, with equal consistency, officiate in the church of England, the church of Rome, or among the Moham-medans, as among the dissenters.

This, however, is too often the progress of infidelity with the thoughtless and half thinking laity; and to keep them in a proper medium, must be owned to be of great importance, and a matter of great difficulty. I know of nothing that is so likely to be effectual for this purpose, as the prudent conduct, and true moderation of ministers. Let it appear, by the whole of your behaviour,

TO PROTESTANT DISSIDENTS. 69.

viour, that you are *serious christians*, and not ashamed of any practices which are of real use to form a christian and devout temper. Let it be seen, that the doctrines of christainity have a real and happy effect upon your hearts and lives, and that, by virtue of a practical faith in its great principles you are possessed of an uniform chearfulness of mind, are enabled to live in a firm confidence in divine providence, under all the events of life, and prepared to die with composure and good hope.

Carefully avoid insulting or ridiculing those who differ from you in opinion, especially those who retain the principles you yourselves once held. This shows as much bigotry and want of real candour as their censoriousness, and readiness to pass a sentence of damnation upon you. Nay, it may be said, in excuse for their zeal in condemning your opinions, that they consider them as inconsistent with salvation; whereas you do not pretend that their opinions are so dangerous to them. There may, therefore, be the sincerest friendship in their anger, but there is wanton cruelty in your laughter.

Let it appear that the principal object of your attention is the proper duty of your profession,



profession, and let no taste you may have for any of the *polite arts*, as music, painting, or poetry, nor a capacity for improvements in *science*, engage you to make them more than an *amusement* to you, or, at the most, any more than an object of secondary consideration. Let not even the study of *speculative theology* prevent your applying yourself chiefly to the advancement of *virtue* among your hearers. Let your conduct demonstrate, that you consider one soul reclaimed from vicious habits, or even one person's mind confirmed in any good resolution, as a greater acquisition to you, than the detection of any speculative error, the illustration of any known truth, or the discovery of any new ones.

With respect to your general manner of behaviour, let not a sense of your inferiority to your hearers, in point of fortune, lead you into any mean and servile compliances with their foibles and opinions; nor, on the other hand, let a sense of the dignity of your office, or your advantage in point of sense and learning, betray you into pride, arrogance, and an overbearing decisive manner in conversation, which cannot fail to give offence. Study human nature and mankind, but with no other view than to  
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do them good. Endeavour to be cheerful, polite (as far as that term conveys the idea of a reasonable desire to please) and free from affectation. Take no pains to conceal any natural peculiarity of manner, that is innocent in itself, and not offensive to others; for, above all things, *simplicity of character*, and the greatest freedom from artifice and disguise, becomes the teachers of the religion of Jesus Christ.

Let it appear that, in consequence of being much conversant with subjects suited to your profession, you have acquired a superiority of mind to this world, and all the things of it; that you are chiefly solicitous about the faithful and impartial discharge of your duty (which is to inculcate upon others the same christian temper and conduct, of which you exhibit an example in yourselves) and let it appear, that this consciousness of doing your duty, gives you a practical and habitual reliance on the providence of God, for the supply of your wants, and the care of your families after you are dead.

If, however, you have a fair opportunity of making provision for futurity, by no means neglect to do it; and I sincerely wish that every student for the christian ministry among the dissenters would, in the course

course of his education, give attention to those branches of knowledge, by which he might be of use to society, independent of his profession as a minister. This would prove a resource to him in a day of adversity, and, in the mean time would make him be regarded by his people with more of that respect, which is always paid to persons that are independent of them.

It was not my purpose to defend to *particular advises*, but there are two subjects, on which I think I ought not to omit this opportunity of addressing you. The first, and the most important is, that you take proper measures to promote *religious knowledge* among your hearers, by no means neglecting to ground them well in the true principles of our dissent. It is notorious, that along with the spirit of controversy the *love of truth* has, in too great a measure, left us; and that many of our youth, particularly in genteel and opulent families, are brought up in great ignorance.

Family prayer, and consequently the regular reading of the scriptures, being laid aside, the younger branches of the family have a very imperfect acquaintance with the contents of the sacred books; and it is to be feared



TO PROTESTANT DISSENTERS. 73.

feared that their posterity, being of course still more ignorant, will know little or nothing of the difference between one mode of christianity and another, or concerning christianity itself; and that a very trifling circumstance may convert the nominal dissenter into a nominal churchman, and the nominal christian into an unbeliever, and of the most profligate kind. Whereas, if men actually read, and *study* their bible, and consequently understand their religion, there must be some uncommon fatality in their circumstances, if they disbelieve it, or become indifferent to it; and if a man really knows the ground of our *rational dissent* from the church of England, I will venture to say, that, if he has been educated in it, he must bid adieu to virtue, and the prime of virtues, *integrity*, before he can desert the dissenting interest.

The second subject of my advice respects your *manner of preaching*, or the delivery of your sermons. It appears to me that there are two extremes in this case, and that both of them are too prevalent among us. Some ministers, whose discourses are excellent, deliver them with a shameful carelessness and unconcern, with no force or energy, suited to their importance. This

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manner of preaching can never engage a suitable attention. The discourses of the same persons are also, generally, too refined for the common people. Such preaching therefore, can neither be *understood*, nor *felt*, by the hearers. How then can it profit them? For the same reason, it cannot please. And how can a man expect to be well attended, who communicates neither *profit* nor *pleasure*?

On the other hand, some of our ministers seem to study nothing but the art of harranguing the populace. Not content with speaking with that earnestness and dignity which becomes the importance of the things they have to deliver, their principal object is merely to excite a *temporary emotion*; if they be not seeking their own praise, and emolument.

With these views it becomes a maxim with them that every discourse must be striking, or affecting; which necessarily begets a false taste in eloquence, and gives them a habit of flourishing, or bawling, upon the most indifferent subjects; till at length, insensible of the change in themselves, they come never to speak from just and *real feelings*; but their whole service is a piece of *artifice*, visible to every man of sense, and  
who

who is acquainted with human nature, and pleasing to none but those who are dupes to the grossest illusions; who are charmed with every noise, and agitated with every motion of the limbs, or contortion of the features.

To guard against both these extremes, was, one would think, the easiest thing in the world; but in fact, it is by no means so. The foundation, however, of a good and just delivery is to be truly serious, to understand and feel every thing a man says, and to express himself in the most natural manner. The former of these belongs to the virtues of the heart, but the latter must be acquired by the use of proper means; more especially great pains must be taken to form the voice for speaking to a large company. Otherwise, a person who has been used to speak only to a few people, in a room of an ordinary size, will have no idea of making himself heard by a large audience, without losing his natural emphasis, cadence, and tone of voice. He, is therefore, sure to contract some awkward and absurd habit, even though he be ever so serious and in earnest, and consequently have no affectation.

The art of public speaking, therefore,



must be studied, and the instructions of a master must be accompanied with frequent exercise. But when this is done, and when practice has made it *habitual*, a *just temper of mind* is all that is requisite to form the most perfect speaker; by which I mean not one whose talents will strike the bulk of mankind, or gain him the most noisy applause, but whose manner will command the attention of those who are disposed to think.

If a man have not reputation in view, if he aim at nothing besides making converts to truth and virtue, and will content himself with endeavouring simply to convey his own *just*, and sometimes *warm* conceptions to others, he will speak so as to inform, or animate, them as occasion will require. He will make them think of, understand, and act upon, what he says. And the reputation he *indirectly* acquires, though it will be less than that of many who less deserve it, will be *sufficient*; and if he be a good man, and a good christian, it will content him.

## SECTION

## SECTION VI.

*Of the low state of the dissenting interest, and the causes of it.*

IT is possible that some of those who are called *rational dissenters* may be discouraged by the *smallness of the party*, and the seemingly declining state of the interest. But this is an objection that will hardly bear to be avowed, and can only have weight with weak minds. The cause of *truth and liberty* can never cease to be respectable, whether its advocates be few or many. Rather, if the cause be just and honourable, the smaller is the party that support it, the fewer there are to share that honour with us. It can never be matter of praise to any man to join a multitude, but to be singular in a good thing is the greatest praise. It shows a power of discernment, and fortitude of mind, not to be overborne by those unworthy motives, which are always on the side of the majority, whether their cause be good or bad.

That there are few dissenters of very large fortunes, especially in the country, is very true; but it may be accounted for, in a manner that is far from reflecting

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That there are few dissenters of very large fortunes, especially in the country, is very true; but it may be accounted for, in a manner that is far from reflecting

any dishonour on the interest. Many dissenters have been born to great fortunes, and many others have themselves acquired large fortunes by trade; but when this has been the case, as the possession of wealth naturally tends to make men more worldly minded, and expose them more to the influence of worldly views; and as men naturally aspire to rank with their superiors, rather than their inferiors in fortune, they have not been able to find proper persons to associate with, except in the established church; and the consequence of such connexions is evident. Many persons, also, have left the dissenters after marrying into families that go to church. But these are motives intirely foreign to the *merits* of the cause, and therefore will never have the least influence with men of reason and religion. Let a number of persons be produced who will gravely say, they left the dissenting interest, and went to the established church, from real *conviction of mind*, and after a mature consideration; and if even their new acquaintance believe them, this objection shall be considered again.

It will be said the dissenting *ministers*, and especially those who are called *free* in their sentiments, frequently conform to the church

church of England. It is acknowledged<sup>d</sup> but, at the same time, it is apprehended that when the members of the establishment consider all the circumstances attending these *conversions*, they will see little to boast of in the acquisition. It is well known that many of them have been men of profligate lives, or despicable characters, who were dismissed with ignominy from the service of the dissenters; others, there is reason enough to suppose, found nothing among the dissenters suited to their ambitious views. It may perhaps be true, that some could not get a decent maintenance by their labours. However the class of dissenters to which they acknowledged to have belonged (*viz.* those who, in their sentiments, differ the most from the principles of the church of England) is a sufficient indication of *what kind* must have been the motives of their conformity. For, as it can never be pretended, that they have changed their sentiments concerning those articles, which the rational part of the dissenters object to the most in the church of England, the motives could not be *serious conviction*; so that their subscription to articles which they do not believe, but which they continue to preach against, and even to laugh at, must



either have been a subscription to them as *articles of peace*, or as far as they are *agreeable to the scriptures*, or with some other of those *miserable equivocations*, the futility of which has been so clearly exposed by the author of the Confessional.

If, however, any dissenting minister has really, from full conviction of mind, *ex animo*, subscribed his assent and consent to *all, and every of the thirty nine articles* of the church of England, and also to all and every thing else that a clergyman is required to subscribe (the possibility of which I do not absolutely deny) I think the loss is by no means to be regretted. Let the bigots to the church set a high value upon him. He is *rara avis in terris, nigroque simillima cygno*.

Persons who are descended from members of the church of England, who are educated by clergymen, who are introduced into the ministry at an English university, where *theology*, if I be rightly informed, makes no part of their study, and where it is the custom to subscribe at a time of life, when it cannot be supposed they have reflected on the nature of the action; who see that they do no more than all their friends and acquaintance do, and continue to do,  
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without the least scruple; and who, perhaps, never heard any objection made to it, are to be considered in a very different light from dissenting ministers, who generally study theological subjects with great care; who also, in consequence of hearing the business of subscription frequently discussed, cannot but have reflected on the nature of solemnly subscribing to what they do not believe, and of repeating, in acts of divine worship, what their consciences disclaim. Every allowance may reasonably be made for the former; but, I own, that I can make no apology for the latter, except such an apology as may be made for sacrificing, in any other case, the sacred rights of conscience to some other consideration.

I cannot help considering the clergy of the *church of Scotland* as more criminal in the article of subscription than the clergy of the church of England; because the course of their studies necessarily brings the subject more frequently in their view. Indeed, with respect to all matters of theology, the minds of the Scotch ministers are certainly, of late years, much more enlightened, and yet their practice is not more reformed. Numbers of the young ministers avow their disbelief of the Scotch confession of faith, &c. they see the business of sub-

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scription to it in its just and odious light; they cannot help feeling, or forbear complaining of the imposition; and yet I cannot say that I have heard of many of these *bold freethinkers* refusing to subscribe, and for so paltry an advantage as a Scotch living. I call it *paltry* when I consider the *price* that is paid for it. As a salary for a minister, I think it sufficient, and respectable. But certainly it argues a baser soul in a man, to sacrifice his conscience for a *small* than for a *great* consideration.

Upon the whole, when the reasons of the small number of dissenters are such as have been represented, this smallness of their number is far from being a matter of reflection upon them, or what they need to be ashamed of. Besides, there are many important ends which the existence of the dissenting interest answers, even with respect to the established church itself, which make it well worth supporting. It necessarily operates as a check upon the clergy, and prevents them from sinking into that indolence, luxury, ignorance, and arrogance, to which, as men, with little or no controul, they would otherwise be more subject; and their literary pride must be kept within bounds by seeing, among the dissenters, men equal to themselves in genius, application

cation to study, and an acquaintance with all branches of useful science.

This circumstance cannot fail also to rouse a laudable emulation, which will be of unspeakable advantage to the interests both of polite literature, and of real knowledge of all kinds. And without a dissenting interest of some kind, there would hardly be a possibility of any *reformation in the church*, an event which the wisest and best among the clergy earnestly wish for, and are labouring to bring about. Light always breaks out by degrees, and is only from seeing a variety of *experiments*, as they may be called, of reformation, that the nation in general can be able to judge what are real improvements, and select such as will best suit themselves.

If, therefore, there be any, who are friends of the church of England, on any other account than the prospect of providing for some of their relations and dependents by its emoluments, they cannot shew a truer regard to it, than by favouring the dissenting interest; because, whatever is decent and respectable in the church is, in some measure, owing to the dissenters. So long as the dissenting interest is a nursery for men of liberal and enlarged minds,



who make it their study to restore christianity to its primitive simplicity (and many such it can boast at present) so long as it is the cause of civil and religious liberty (which it can never cease to be) and so long as it is a check upon the disorders into which the established clergy would otherwise sink (which, also, it can never cease to be) it must appear a truly *respectable* interest, in the eyes of all men who are capable of entertaining just and generous views of things, though it be ever so inconsiderable with respect to numbers.

As to the number of dissenters in England, it must be considered, that, notwithstanding the seeming declension of what we call the rational part of the dissenters, there is, perhaps, rather an increase than a decrease upon the whole. Those who are called *Independents*, retain all the zeal of the old puritans; and though several of their societies are become what we call more *free* in their sentiments, they receive daily recruits from the *Methodists*; and many very numerous societies of *Independents* have been formed intirely out of that body. Even these new made dissenters will, by degrees, necessarily come to think freely, and supply the places of those

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rational,

TO PROTESTANT DISSENTERS. 85

rational, but luke-warm dissenters, who are daily absorbed either in the *church* or in *irreligion*; and thus may the *circulation*, at least, be kept up.

I cannot help considering the *Methodists* as raised up by divine providence, at a most seasonable juncture, as a barrier against the encroachments of ecclesiastical tyranny, in the declension of the old dissenting interest. For whatever be the real views of their leaders, one great point, in favour of the dissenting interest, is gained with all the *Methodists*; which is, that though they communicate with the church of England, they are no longer attached to the hierarchy as such. That blind and bigoted attachment, which is the great hold that the clergy have on the minds of the common people, is broken, the moment they can chuse to worship God without the walls of the parish church, and without the use of the common prayer-book. Their minds are, from that time, at liberty to consider the expediency of different forms of worship, and to adopt that to which their judgment shall give the preference; and as public worship is universally conducted among them; in the same manner as among the dissenters, they are  
already

already *in the way* to us, from the established church. When such a spirit of reformation is raised, it will not be in the power of those who have the most influence among them to say, *Hitherto shall it go and no farther*. It is not improbable, that a great revolution may take place in their affairs, when the heads of two or three of their present leaders shall be laid in the grave.

## SECTION VII.

*Of the divided state of the dissenting interest.*

**I** AM aware of another circumstance, which may make the dissenting interest appear despicable in the eyes of some; and I shall not conceal, but consider, and reply to the objection that arises from it. We are split into such a number of *sects* and parties (some of which discover a mean, contracted, and illiberal spirit, treating their antagonists with hatred and abhorrence, while others treat theirs with a supercilious contempt) that some persons may be ashamed of having any thing to do with us. The charge is, in a great measure, true; but this *divided state* of  
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the dissenting interest is inseparable from the *freedom* we all profess and enjoy, and, consequently, from the great good that evidently arises from the exercise of that freedom.

Besides, it is wrong to consider the dissenters as *one body*. They have nothing necessarily in common, but their claim to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences; those consciences, being the consciences of different men, dictate very different things; and no person is responsible for more than his own sentiments and conduct. I cannot but say, however, that I heartily wish all the sects of dissenters would consider, that, in consequence of their agreement in this one circumstance, concerning their natural right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, they have great interests in common; and, that they would, for this reason, entertain less animosity against one another, on account of the things in which they differ.

Though it happen, that in the town in which you live, there be no society of dissenters that you can intirely approve of, it can hardly happen, but that there will be some, which if you consider seriously,  
you

you may more conscientiously join with, than with the church of England. If we take in every thing relating to doctrine, discipline, and method of worship, I think there is no sect or denomination among us, that is not nearer to the standard of the gospel than the established church; so that, even in those circumstances, you will be a dissenter, if reason, and not passion, or prejudice, be your guide.

If when you reside for any time in the country, you chuse to go to church rather than to the dissenting meeting-house, because the dissenters happen to make no great figure in the place; if you feel any thing like *shame*, upon seeing the external meanness of the interest, and secretly wish to have your connexions with it concealed; conclude, that the *spirit of this world* has got too much hold of you, and that *religious motives* have lost their influence.

If this be your general practice (and I wish I could say it was not so, with many of the more opulent among us) you are but half a dissenter; and a few more worldly considerations would throw you intirely into the church of England, or into any church upon earth. With this temper of mind you would, in primitive times, have been

TO PROTESTANT DISSENTERS. 89

been ashamed of *christianity* itself, and have joined the more fashionable and pompous heathen worship. But consider what our Lord says with a view to all such circumstances as these, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him also shall the son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his father, with his holy angels.*

General, alas! and fatal is the influence of *fashion* in what it ought to have the least concern with, matters of *religion*. Members of the reformed churches on the continent, who are generally presbyterians, seldom scruple to join the episcopal church of England, evidently for no other reason, than because it is the most illustrious of the protestant churches in the island; and because, in this connexion, they are more in the way of being taken notice of by persons of figure and distinction, and thereby advancing themselves in life. Rapin, the historian, acknowledged himself to be a presbyterian, but at the same time avowed his constant communion with the church of England when he resided here.

If you be an *unitarian*, and, in other respects, one of those who are called the free-



free thinking party among the dissenters; and if there be no dissenting place of worship that you can conveniently attend, except one belonging to those who are of the rigid Independent party; and if you think that, in joining with them, you countenance many antichristian errors; still, you should consider that, in going to the established church, you not only countenance the very same *antichristian errors*, but an *antichristian hierarchy* also, and a number of other abuses, which can never subsist among any sect of dissenters whatever. And it appears to me, that every man is under an obligation to support the public worship of God, in that manner which he most approves upon the whole, notwithstanding it may contain many things which he cannot approve; provided that it be so circumstanced, that his attendance upon doth not imply his joining in any thing that is sinful.

If you be of the other party of dissenters, I need say nothing to persuade you to adhere to the interest. Though you are much nearer to the established church than any other party of dissenters, you justly consider the points in which you do differ from it, to be of so much importance, that

TO PROTESTANT DISSENTERS. 91

that you will maintain the separation in the lowest state possible, rather than give it up intirely.

Besides, as you do not lay so much stress upon a *learned ministry*, a number of you, so small as not to be able to support a regular minister, can meet together, and *edify one another*, after the manner of the primitive church; which I mention not with ridicule, but with real approbation. Christianity may, surely, exist without the aid of human learning; and the notion of the validity of the administration of christian ordinances, depending upon any particular order of men, who must subsist wholly by the ministry, is, I think, exploded by us all.

I would seriously advise all persons who have families, and who cannot conscientiously join in public worship with any christian societies in their neighbourhood, to set up the public worship of God in their own houses, and to invite, or permit others to join them in it. In this most reasonable practice, all unitarians may be assisted by the *Forms* that I lately published for *Unitarian Worship*, or Mr. Lindsey's Liturgy. Commentaries on the Scriptures, and excellent Discourses, may easily be had;  
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and surely they are not the less edifying for being *printed*.

Divisions among dissenters cannot afford any better foundation for an objection to the dissenting interest, than divisions among christians in general afford for an objection to christianity itself. Indeed this circumstance cannot supply a just and reasonable objection to any scheme of religion; for there are sects and parties in them all.

To conclude, I do not know that I have concealed any thing relating to the dissenting interest, that can afford any person a pretence for deserting it; and recommending what I have said in reply to the various objections to it, and concerning the difficulties and discouragements attending it, with what I have farther advanced in favour of it, to your deliberate and candid attention,

I am Gentlemen,

Your very humble Servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.



## POSTSCRIPT.

I CANNOT conclude this ADDRESS without mentioning a circumstance, which may be thought to be trifling, but which has an evident connexion with things that are of considerable consequence, and which did not immediately fall under any of the heads of the preceding sections. It is the growing neglect of *attendance on public worship*, among those who are called *rational dissenters*. This is, at the same time, a *cause*, and an *effect* of the prevailing indifference both to religion in general, and the dissenting interest in particular.

When a number of persons consider themselves as having great interests in common, they will be fond of appearing in their common and public character; and, indeed, upon other occasions, their common sentiments, views, and expectations will be the subject of their common conversation.

It gives me concern to observe, that not only *religious*, but almost all *serious* discourse, except on subjects of worldly policy, or business, is, in a manner, banished from polite company; in so much that the whole

whole conduct of many persons professing christianity, under the denomination of *protestants*, and *rational dissenters*, I am afraid, might be observed with the utmost attention, for weeks and months together, without a possibility of discovering, from any circumstance (except a few matters of mere form, which custom has not yet abolished) whether they made profession of any religion, or not. Certainly, then, he least that can be concluded is, that it is not a matter of the first consequence with them.

Considerable allowance, however, must be made for the influence of modesty, or rather of a false shame. Many persons, I am willing to hope, *think* of religion, are influenced by the motives of it, and conscientiously practice its most substantial duties, who are seldom heard to *talk* upon the subject. But a just zeal will break through this false shame, which, if it be not injurious to a man's self, is greatly so to others; who will necessarily conclude that he either believes nothing of religion, or that he has very little value for it, when he does not discover it by his conversation; so that the influence of our *example*, in favour of religion is altogether given up by this conduct.

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The least that you can do, my brethren, towards reviving a just zeal in matters of religion, is conscientiously to attend public worship yourselves, and to see that your children and servants do the same along with you; unless they give you reason to think that they object to your mode of worship on a principle of conscience. Admit, therefore, of no excuse, except real sickness, and works of absolute necessity, either for your own non-attendance, or for theirs.

You justly distinguish between duties that are properly of a *moral* nature, and those that are in themselves *indifferent*, as the observance of days and times must be acknowledged to be. But, in consequence of some persons over-valuing positive institutions, many of you greatly undervalue them, to the injury of yourselves and others. In things of acknowledged divine appointment, and that are known to have been appointed for the sake of their subserviency to moral purposes, as the institution of a *day of rest*, and of the *Lord's supper*, the difference between a regard to them, and to the morality to which they are subservient is not so very great. So nearly are they of equal obligation, that the man whose rule of life is an impartial obedience



ence to the will of God, will not neglect the one, but for the sake of the other; and the cases in which a regard to moral virtue will really interfere with the observance of positive duties, are very few.

Travelling on Sundays is now become so common, that if many persons, who call themselves christians, and rational dissenters, be taking a journey of a few days, it may with certainty be concluded, that the *day of rest* will be one of them; and if it be confined to a single day, and can possibly be thrown upon that, it is almost sure to be so.

I am no advocate for the very rigorous manner in which many of our ancestors observed this day; but certainly, if we pay any regard to the original design of the institution, it should be made, as far as possible, a day of rest for all the creation of God. We ought therefore conscientiously to refrain from doing business ourselves, or making our cattle labour on that day. Besides, if there be any propriety in attending upon public worship on the Lord's-day, it must be agreeable to reason, that we spend the day in a manner consistent with that use of it; and therefore that we abstain from all such exercises and diversions as  
would

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would tend to defeat the purpose of religious worship, by erasing the effect of moral and religious instruction.

But whether business, pleasure, or mere indolence and indifference be the *cause*, the *effect* is manifest, and is growing every day more alarming. Consider that the decent and reverent attendance upon public worship on the Lord's-day, is almost the only means of promoting the knowledge and practice of christianity among the lower ranks of people, who are confined to labour all the rest of the week. And how can their attendance be effectually enforced, but by the example, influence, and authority of their superiors?

The interest of any particular party or denomination of christians is certainly trifling, in comparison with the greater considerations of religion and morality just now mentioned; but if you wish well to the dissenting interest, you should consider how much it suffers in consequence of your neglect of public worship.

Your ministers are discouraged by this means, and your children and servants get a habit of indifference, or of roving from place to place; whereby their attachment to the cause is continually lessening. Your re-

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missness, therefore, in attending public worship promotes a desertion of the interest, by making the transition as easy to them as possible. For when things have been in this train, to abandon the interest intirely is breaking no established custom, or confirmed habit; so that those persons who have been very indifferent to public worship, can have little or no difficulty with respect to themselves; and the thing being done almost without the notice of others, the difficulty on that side is also obviated. When the change is so gradual, it is, at length, no surprise to any body, to hear that those who attended the dissenting-meeting-house but seldom, cease to attend there at all. Otherwise, the difficulty that arises from the force of custom, is so great, in many cases, that though a man might wish to change his mode of worship, he would not chuse to expose himself to so much of the notice and censure of his friends and acquaintance as, by such a step in his conduct, he is sensible that he necessarily must do. But, by being less frequently in company with dissenters, their opinion and censure have less weight with him.

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**I** MUST extend this Postscript, in order to express my earnest wishes, that, in  
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this age, in which so many dissenters are running into *enthusiasm* on one hand, and *infidelity* on the other, those who have at heart the cause of truth, christianity, and religious liberty, would endeavour to draw the attention of mankind to those subjects, and others that are connected with them.

There can be no doubt, but that these great interests will be taken care of by him who is constituted *head over all things to that church*, against which *the gates of hell shall not prevail*; but it appears to me that this end is to be accomplished by natural and human means, and that the judicious and zealous *labourers in this vineyard* are but few. The real friends of the cause of religion and virtue ought therefore, to exert themselves; and it cannot but give us encouragement, and raise our generous emulation, to think that success in these glorious attempts is, to a certain degree, infallible. And what just reason will a man have to be *ashamed in the day of Christ*, who might have been among the foremost in supporting this cause, and yet, through indolence and inattention, let others carry away that palm, which will then be esteemed the most honourable.

On the other hand, it must be acknowledged, that the greatest care should be

taken, not to injure the best of causes, by injudicious or unseasonable attempts to serve it. In this case, however, there will be the praise of honest zeal, and good intention. Besides, it must be a very poor and weak manner of address indeed, that is calculated to do no good; and if one were written by an angel from heaven, it would offend and disgust many. Since there is such a variety in the previous dispositions and tastes of readers, let writers also indulge their own natural taste and manner. The man who means well can hardly fail to instruct and edify some, though he must lay his account with displeasing, and perhaps injuring others; and as the calculation of the probability of doing the most good or harm seems to be, in this case, too difficult for human comprehension, our best rule is to sow what we apprehend to be *good seed*, and leave the issue to the great *Lord of the harvest*; that is, strenuously to urge whatever appears to us, upon mature deliberation, to be favourable to truth and virtue, and to leave the consequences to him who knows them, who is interested in them, and who will attend to them; so as to bring good out of all the evil that we may inadvertently occasion. *Let us, therefore, consider one another, to provoke*  
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TO PROTESTANT DISSENTERS. 101

*unto love and to good works. Let us exhort one another, and so much the more as we see the day approaching. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Heb. x. 24. 35. 37.*

As to the contempt of the world, I had almost said, happy are they who have the greatest share of it. This, at least, is true with respect to all the unthinking and vicious part of it. And there certainly will be cases, to the end of this state of trial and discipline, to which the following words of our Lord will be applicable. *Wo unto you when all men shall speak well of you. Luke vi. 26. But blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. Matt. v. 11, 12.* It will always, I doubt not, be true, in some measure, that *all who would live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution.* And persecution unto death is by means the only one, or perhaps the most difficult to bear, of all the modes of trial to which we are exposed. Of the number who *make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience*, there are probably but few who have been in these circumstances.

Consider what was observed by the apostle



the Paul, at the first promulgation of the gospel, viz. that *not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called.* 1 Cor. i. 26. and that the influence of *wealth, power, and fashion*, is the very same at this day, that it was in his time, and will probably continue to be so to the end of the world. It cannot therefore, but be a suspicious circumstance with respect to truly christian sentiments, maxims, and conduct, that they are *fashionable*, or that they render a man more acceptable to those who have not their *conversation in heaven*, but who *mind earthly things only*. I do not say that a popular religion cannot be a true one, but that the man who finds himself popular on a religious account; I mean popular with those persons whose interests and prospects are foreign to christianity, should suspect himself, and carefully re-examine his religious principles, and not pursue them, and act upon them, but with the greatest caution and deliberation.

It is happy, however, that our religion does not leave us without consolation under this contempt of the world, which we incur by adhering to it. For besides the assurance that, *if we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him, and be glorified together*; and  
that

that if we *overcome the world*, in imitation of him who has done it before us, we shall *fit down with him on his throne*, as *he also has overcome, and is now sat down with his father on his throne*; we can balance our loss of the esteem of the world, with the acquisition of the much more valuable love and esteem of our fellow christians, of the few whose sentiments and views are the same with our own, and whose countenance will be more than sufficient to support us under all the odium, that we can lie under, on account of the opinions of those, whose judgments we despise. And if a man have but a tolerable share of comprehension, and strength of mind, he cannot hesitate what part to chuse. He will easily make light of *suffering shame* for the present, in a cause that is sure to be crowned with everlasting glory hereafter.

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N. B. The principal *additions* to the second edition of this ADDRESS are Section III. on the manner in which dissenters ought to speak and write concerning the church of England; the advices to ministers concerning the instruction of youth, and the delivery of sermons at the end of Section IV (which were added at the request  
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of an anonymous correspondent) and this Postscript.

I beg leave to refer to my *Letters, in answer to some Remarks on my Publications and on this Address*, for a more particular account of the nature of *christian idolatry* than is given p. 36; and to my *View of the principles and conduct of the protestant dissenters, with respect to the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of England*, for many other particulars relating to them, not treated of here. I, also, cannot help expressing my wishes that what I have observed on the subject of *church discipline*, may be seriously considered by those who call themselves *rational dissenters*; that, whether any of my proposals for reformation be approved of, or not, something, at least, may be attempted, in order to obviate the manifest inconveniences which I have pointed out, and which have been long felt and complained of, by serious and thinking persons, in our present situation.

7 JUL 66

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